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THE BERLIN PROBLEM IN 1961

The Quest for a New Approach

1. After more than two years since the original Khrushchev threat of November 1958, unilaterally to terminate Western rights in Berlin, the Three Occupying Powers and the Federal Republic find themselves in a frustrating and worrisome situation. Despite the temporary lull in harassment of access and recent East German concessions permitting the restoration of interzonal trade arrangements, we know that, whenever it suits their purposes, the Soviets and the East Germans can again precipitate an active crisis and restore Berlin to the front pages of the world press.

2. Now this is a thoroughly unsatisfactory state of affairs for the West. It inevitably gives rise to the desire for some new approach.

Critics of Western policy castigate it for immobility, lack of imagination, and failure to seize the initiative, and even those who are aware of the complexities and limitations inherent in our position cannot but hope that somewhere, somehow, a new and resolving formula can be found. In anticipation of further Soviet pressures within the coming months, it may be useful to review the status of the Berlin question and the approaches realistically open to us.

Soviet Objectives

3. Consideration of what can be done about Berlin must necessarily start with some estimate of Soviet objectives. Allowing for variations in emphasis, two broad explanatory theories have been advanced: (a) that the Soviets are using Berlin essentially as a lever to achieve their wider purpose of obtaining recognition

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recognition of the GDR and consolidation of the satellite bloc, or (b) that West Berlin is a primary objective in itself/



4. Why, however, did the Soviets do specifically what they did in November 1958, and why have they been deterred from proceeding along their threatened unilateral path during the ensuing period?

The Development of the Crisis

5. The Berlin crisis has gone through four broad phases:

a. Following upon the Soviet note of November 27, 1958, there was an initial period of mutual restatement of position and exchanges of notes leading up to the Geneva Conference of Foreign Ministers which began on May 11, 1959. This was a period of intensive diplomatic activity among the Western powers during which they drew up the Western Peace Plan and made considerable progress in their contingency planning.

b. The period of the Geneva Conference of Foreign Ministers (May-August 1959) during the course of which the West agreed to discuss Berlin outside the context of German reunification and advanced proposals (rejected by the Soviets) for an "interim arrangement" on Berlin. The Soviets in turn made unacceptable proposals for an "interim arrangement".

c. The period between the Camp David talks and the collapse of the Paris Summit Meeting in May 1960. This likewise

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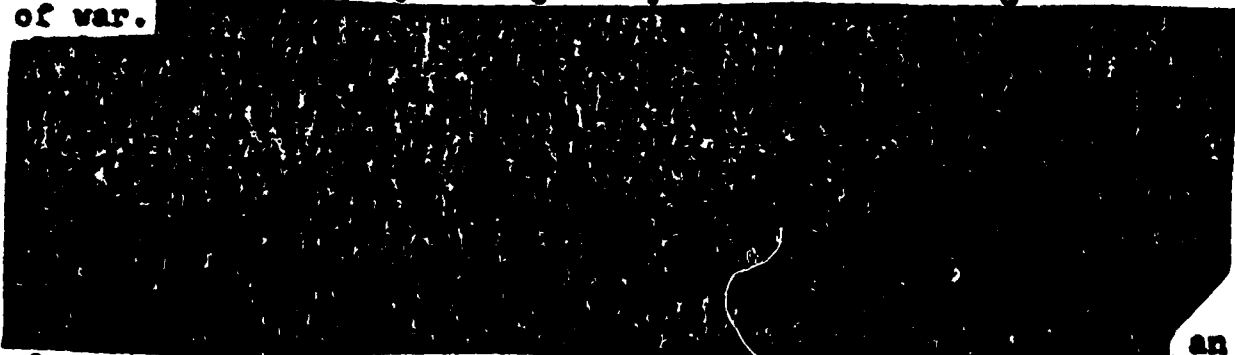
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was a period of intensive Western diplomatic activity and many preparatory meetings.

d. The post-Summit period of relative diplomatic quiescence and of further Soviet postponement of threatened unilateral action pending the inauguration of a new American administration. GDR harassment of German civilian access provoked Western countermeasures which, in turn, led to GDR concessions, and by the end of 1960 the situation in and about Berlin had returned to as near normal as it ever gets.

6. It is reasonable to assume that, in November of 1958, the Soviets expected the combination of threat, pressure, and offer to negotiate to lead to a collapse of Western determination and acceptance of something along the lines of their free city proposal. Their subsequent postponement of what they claimed to be inevitable, their willingness to wait until some further negotiation or some other event had occurred, may be attributed to Soviet doubt that they could take the threatened unilateral action without precipitating a major crisis involving the risk of war.



an element of doubt has presumably persisted up to now sufficient to have deterred the Soviets from unilateral action.

7. Considered purely as a holding operation, Western efforts since November 1958 have been fairly successful. Nothing essential has changed in Berlin; the city continues to prosper economically; and the morale of the Berliners, despite some ups and downs, continues to be good. Moreover, since the initial Khrushchev threat, more than 350,000 refugees have come from East Germany to the West, the great majority through Berlin -- a

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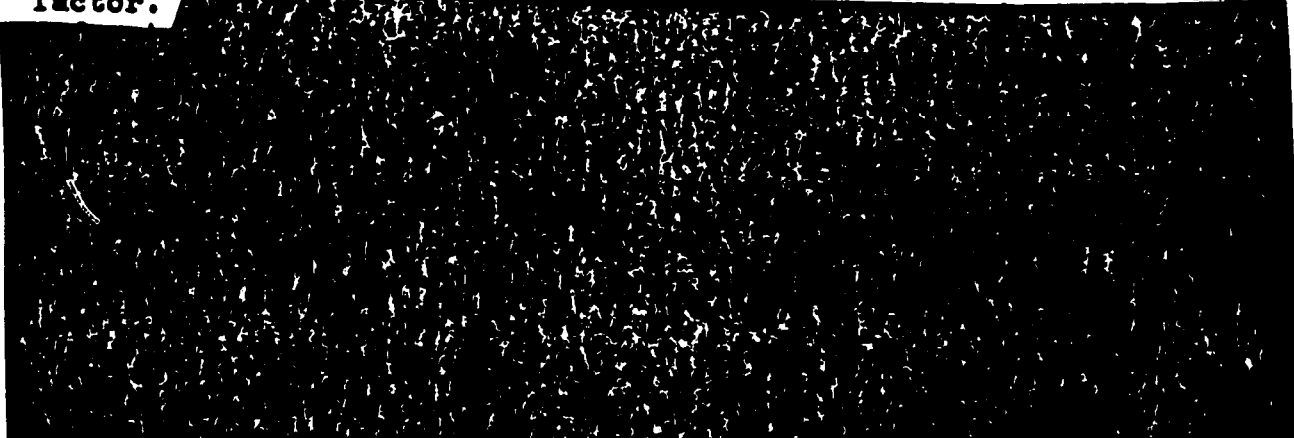
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further demographic drain which an already underpopulated GDR could ill afford.

The Western Approach in 1958-1960

8. From the outset, the Four Western Powers principally concerned have differed to some extent in both their appraisal of the situation and their estimate of desirable policy. These differences have never developed to the point of open disagreement (except in press leaks), and a fine show of Western unity was maintained at the Geneva Conference and the abortive Summit. However, the variations in approach which have emerged during the preparatory work for conferences presumably remain a constant factor.



9. In developing the Western position on Germany and Berlin, the Four Powers have passed through phases somewhat analogous to the four noted above. During the initial phase prior to the Geneva Conference of Foreign Ministers, the West still operated essentially on the assumption that discussion of the Berlin problem should be kept within the context of the all-German question. Within the State Department various new ideas were considered for incorporation into a Western package proposal to replace the Eden Plan of the 1955 Geneva Conference. After months of discussions within a series of Four-Power Working Group sessions in Washington, Paris, and London, some of these ideas survived in the Western Peace Plan put forward at Geneva on May 14, 1959. It is highly questionable whether even a more forthcoming version of

the Peace

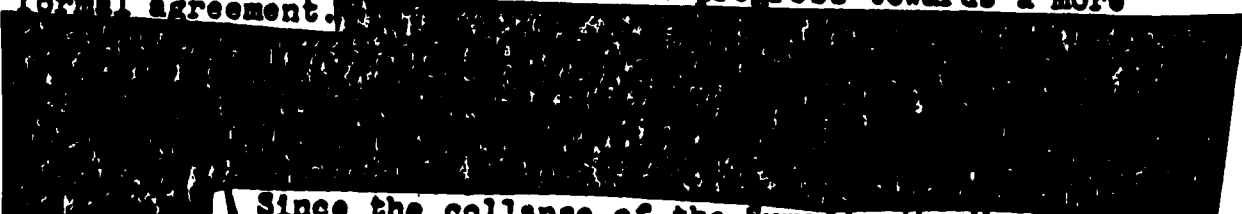
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Peace Plan (still consistent with basic Western interests) would have proved at all negotiable with the Soviets, although the Western package would have been more appealing as propaganda. At any rate after a few weeks of inconclusive discussion of the German question at Geneva, with the Soviets emphasizing the necessity of a peace treaty and all-German talks and the West extolling the merits of the Peace Plan, the conference moved on to the subject of Berlin proper for a wearisome and protracted period. Despite the concern which they caused the Germans and the Berliners, the Western proposals for an interim arrangement on Berlin might have provided a satisfactory modus vivendi for a period of some years. However, it became clear at Geneva that the Soviet concept of an interim arrangement differed too basically from that of the West to make agreement possible.

10. At the subsequent Camp David talks, the only agreement reached on Berlin was that negotiations would be reopened with a view to achieving a solution in accordance with the interests of all concerned and in the interest of the maintenance of peace. Khrushchev gave assurances that, in the meantime, the Soviets would take no unilateral action and President Eisenhower agreed that these negotiations would not be indefinitely prolonged. After an involved preparatory process, the preferred Western objective on Berlin for the Summit emerged as an agreement for a standstill for a period of time during which an attempt might be made at a lower level to achieve progress towards a more formal agreement.



Since the collapse of the Summit, the Western emphasis has been largely on refinement of contingency planning (particularly in the countermeasures field), and there has been little further discussion of the substance of the position which the Western Powers might take into future negotiations with the Soviets on Berlin. Prior to any such negotiations, the Western Powers will presumably have to go through the usual preparatory throes; in any event, the British and French will probably approach us shortly after January 20 in this connection.

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11. It may be noted that, prior to the collapse of the Summit in Paris, the Soviets gave President de Gaulle the text of certain new proposals on Berlin (Tab A). While couched in apparently reasonable language, these were, in some respects, even less satisfactory than their final proposals at Geneva in 1959, and were clearly designed to lead to the ultimate goal of a Free City of West Berlin via an interim arrangement during the course of which the Western Powers would be allowed to bow out of their present position in Berlin. Khrushchev has on several occasions since intimated that these would be the opening Soviet proposals at the next meeting on the subject.

Formulation of the Western Position for 1961

12. The quest for an abiding solution to the Berlin problem is essentially a quest for a satisfactory context. In isolation Berlin will always be a problem, though conceivably less acute if some sort of modus vivendi can be found. It is therefore worth asking once again whether we cannot discover such a broader context.

13. In this search, Chancellor Adenauer has for more than a year emphasized that a real solution to the German problem (and therefore automatically the Berlin problem) could only come within the framework of a general settlement on disarmament. There is certainly much validity in this prescription. If the United States and the Soviet Union should actually be able to agree on the broad lines of a disarmament arrangement, this would undoubtedly do much to relieve pressures on Berlin. We cannot, unfortunately, rely on this happening within the next six to eight months.

14. It may be that Soviet interest in eventual achievement of an agreement on disarmament, and in other areas where, for whatever reasons, we may assume that both East and West have somewhat similar objectives, would provide the basis for a meaningful approach to the Soviets in an attempt to create a proper psychological framework for discussion of the Berlin question. Such an approach, calculated to impress on them the serious results which any unilateral action with respect to Berlin would have, might help to add to the Western deterrent


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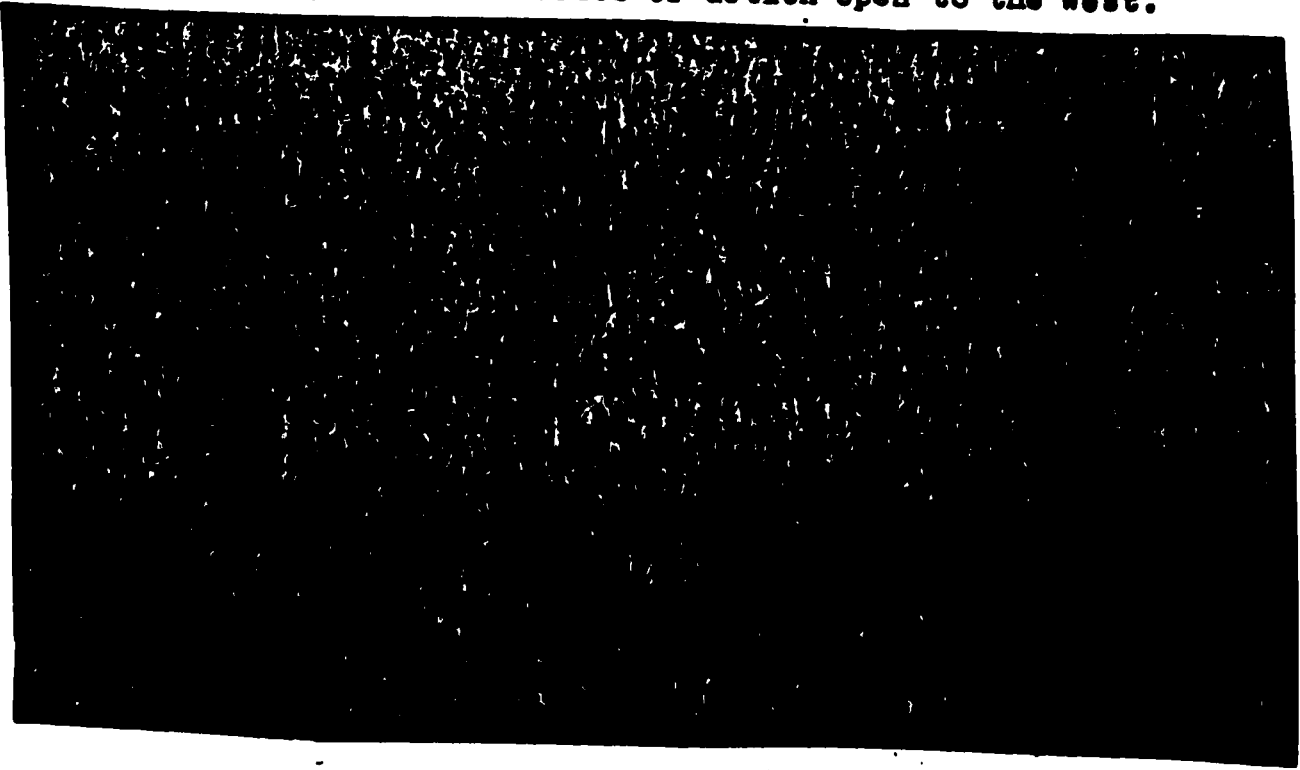
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at a time when some believe that the ultimate threat of thermo-nuclear war is becoming less credible.

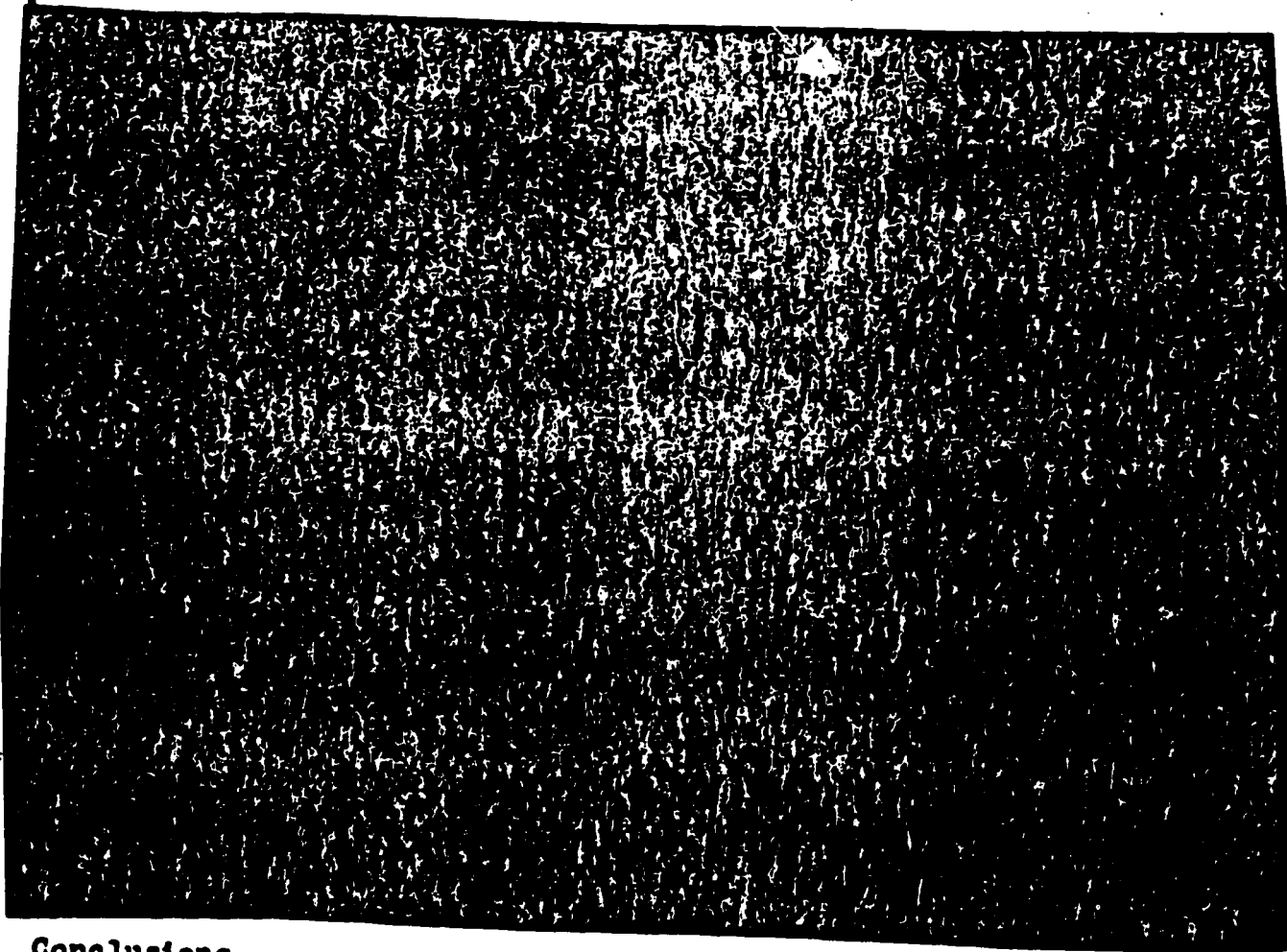


15. It is possible to dream up many different proposals on Berlin, each with its own variants. A distinction, however, between the merely theoretically conceivable and the conceivably possible, narrows down the field for further consideration. All of the approaches indicated below have, of course, come under review to a greater or lesser extent, but it may be useful at this point to note their main characteristics in attempting to appraise the practical courses of action open to the West.

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Conclusions

16. However impelling the urge to find some new approach to the Berlin problem, the ineluctable facts of the situation strictly limit the practical courses of action open to the West. The history of the Berlin crisis since November 1958 gives little reason for thinking that a lasting settlement can be devised which, under current circumstances, will prove acceptable to both East and West.

17. A vital component of the Western position is the maintenance of a credible deterrent against unilateral Soviet action.

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Without this the full geographic weaknesses of the Western position in Berlin will have decisive weight in any negotiation. Thought should be given to the possibility of other deterrents than the pure threat of ultimate thermonuclear war.

18. Further thought should also be given to the possibility of providing some all-German "sweetening" for the continuing discussion of the Berlin question with the Soviets. This should be done, however, in full awareness of the unlikelihood that any real step towards German reunification can be achieved within the calculable future under circumstances acceptable to the West.

19. In planning for further negotiations with the Soviets, the Western Powers must realistically expect that they will once again be forced to discuss the question of Berlin in isolation. While it is unlikely that a satisfactory interim arrangement on the Geneva-type can be achieved, it will probably be necessary and desirable to prove this by actual exchanges during the course of a conference. Under certain ensuing circumstances the Western Powers might find it desirable to aim at a stabilization of existing access procedures but allowing for an East German role along the lines of Solution C, or alternatively they might find it necessary to contemplate the execution of their contingency plans.

Attachments:

Tab A - Soviet Proposals on Berlin

Tab B - Solution C

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